

Direct EORE session to repairmen in the marked area of the communal borehole in Komyshuvakha, Luhansk region, Ukraine.

Image courtesy of DRC-DDG / 2020 / Sychak.

LINKING MINE ACTION AND DEVELOPMENT: The Case of Komyshuvakha

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The protracted crisis in Ukraine raises many developmental, humanitarian, and mine action challenges, and while these are interconnected, the response to them continues to be dichotomous. In part perpetuated by donor preferences and reinforced by technical specialty, humanitarian mine action (HMA) organizations often run parallel to the rest, leaving much of the potential for integration untapped. At the onset of the conflict in 2014, Danish Refugee Council-Danish Demining Group (DRC-DDG) returned to Ukraine and became the first international nongovernmental organization (INGO) to initiate a response to the acute need for HMA in its eastern regions. Throughout, DRC-DDG has been leveraging its diverse expertise in humanitarian, development, and HMA programming. This article presents a case study from a project funded by the European Union on DRC-DDG's latest iteration of linking HMA and development.

Integration Explained. Case studies are key to building collective knowledge but are futile if not positioned within the broader body of work. When compared to the rich tradition of the discourse on development,¹ HMA is indeed more novel.² But it is the *integration* between and within the two that is more recent, conceptually dating to the start of the millennium.³ HMA has since focused on activities that aim to “reduce the social, economic, and environmental impact” of explosive ordnance (EO).⁴ However, little has been done on classifying the linkages between HMA and development, or providing an overview of their entire spectrum. Many have fallen trap to the existing ambiguity, especially since integration has become something of a buzzword,⁵ making it difficult—albeit not impossible—for practitioners to learn from or contribute to the efforts of integrated HMA and development.

We can compare and contrast HMA-development integrations along the lines of dimension, level, degree, time, and type. The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining's (GICHD) guidelines make the dimensional distinction: *integrated mine action* and *linking mine action and development* (LMAD).⁶ The former is dedicated solely to the integration between HMA pillars; the latter refers to integrating HMA with development per se. Moreover, several levels of LMAD are mentioned—communal, subnational, national, and international—with integration ideally present at all. In his article in *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action*, “Linking Mine Action and Development: Local-level Benefits and Challenges,” Russell Gasser also proposed five possible degrees of connectivity within LMAD: no relationship, leader-follower, coordination, support/promote, and integration.⁷ Yet another crucial clarification is offered by Ted Paterson

and Eric Filippino in their article, “The Road to Mine Action and Development: The Life-Cycle Perspective of Mine Action,” where they describe that relationships between HMA and development change over time, gradually shifting from conflict and stabilization to reconstruction and traditional development.⁸ Lastly, authors have written on their country-specific experiences with LMAD, linking HMA either more broadly within Millennium⁹ and Sustainable Development Goals¹⁰ or with particular spheres of development, with economic being one of the oft-quoted examples.^{11,12} Where does this leave DRC-DDG’s experience in Komyshuvakha?

Currently limited in the measurement of its actual efficacy, the case of Komyshuvakha primarily seeks to contribute to the collective implementational know-how of the HMA community. Following the previously mentioned classification, this case study is classified as both integrated HMA and LMAD. DRC-DDG routinely links all HMA-pillar activities in Ukraine. In this article, an integration of humanitarian demining (including non-technical survey [NTS] and marking) and explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) will be described. However, Komyshuvakha is also an example of LMAD, showing the link between integrated HMA on one side, as well as livelihoods, protection (i.e., infrastructural reconstruction), and legal assistance on the development side. Both took place at the community level during a time when the ongoing conflict in Ukraine is steadily transitioning toward stabilization. According to Gasser’s degrees,

this case study would, indeed, represent an integration due to the fact that the development impact took precedence over the mine action aspect. The present case study will provide insights into DRC-DDG’s approach to LMAD and the lessons learned thus far—but not the final impact of the interventions. Given that most activities occurred between autumn 2020 and summer 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, DRC-DDG will only be able to unveil the measurable impact of the interventions pending the final project evaluation in autumn 2021. Having positioned the case study, an introduction to its theoretical and operational framework follows.

Due to the complexity of integrating several programs, tried and tested tools crucially support LMAD projects. DRC-DDG utilized the area-based development (ABD) approach, given its proven applicability in countries with similar backgrounds. Studies from Serbia,¹³ Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁴ illustrate the successes of the ABD in marginalized rural locations of post-conflict, post-socialist countries with development situations similar to Ukraine’s. Alternatives such as the International Humanitarian Demining Development (IHDD) concept were deemed outdated and contextually unsuitable.¹⁵ Admittedly, the ABD is not without its limitations: it is most suited to emergency response rather than fully-fledged development; limited in promoting large-scale reforms, it favors decentralized governance; and financially constrained, it fits best to community development. The ABD thus targets “specific geographical areas in a country, characterized by a



DRC-DDG’s gender-balanced demining team installing mine signs in Komyshuvakha, Luhansk region, Ukraine.

Image courtesy of DRC-DDG / 2020 / Ratushniak.



Figure 1. LMAD project in Komyshuvakha, Ukraine, 2020–2021.

Image courtesy of DRC-DDG / 2021 / Holodniak and Shapovalov.

particular complex development problem, through an integrated, inclusive, participatory, and flexible approach.⁷¹⁶ Its first two steps assess the developmental situation as well as define the target areas.

Demining and Development in Donbas. As categorized in the ABD, conflict (and the consequent EO contamination) continues to be a major developmental and humanitarian problem for eastern Ukraine. Entering its seventh year, the “forgotten crisis”⁷¹⁷ in Ukraine is far from being over, as the armed conflict continues in the eastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk. Consequent to the conflict between the Government of Ukraine and the so-called de facto authorities in 2014, massive EO contamination (from 100 to 7,000 sq km)⁷¹⁸ is now assessed to exist, keeping Ukraine among the top five countries in the world per EO casualties in 2019.⁷¹⁹ DRC-DDG’s internal database recorded 2,197 casualties (resulting from 1,206 incidents) from June

2014 to July 2021 in government-controlled areas (GCA) and non-government-controlled areas (NGCA).⁷²⁰ Major deterrents to understanding the full scope of the issue are the lack of systematic survey and inhibited access to the NGCA.⁷²¹ The most prevalent types of encountered EO are the TM-62M, TM-62P, OZM-72s, and MON series mines—placed by both conventional and nuisance mine-laying—as well as tripwire-initiated hand grenades and unexploded ordnance (UXO).⁷²² With safety and access concerns preventing humanitarian clearance operations in the 5-km buffer zone, the 427-km long contact line is especially EO-ridden. The costs of the conflict, however, worsened an already decaying economy.⁷²³

The second ABD-listed developmental problem affecting Luhansk and Donetsk regions is poverty. The 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview in Ukraine estimated 1.5 million people (particularly the elderly) need assistance related to poor living standards, high unemployment or loss of livelihoods, and food insecurity.⁷²⁴ Isolated settlements close to the contact line are especially affected given long distances to industrial centers, the lack of large businesses, and significant safety concerns related to the cultivation of land.⁷²⁵ Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and massive wildfires in 2020,⁷²⁶ economic insecurity persists as the most pressing issue.⁷²⁷ The Luhansk regional development strategy (2021–2027) also listed an inefficient economy as one of seven barriers to its development, recognizing that it currently represents one of the poorest regions in Ukraine.⁷²⁸ Of the two mentioned regions, DRC-DDG preferred Luhansk due to the location of its HMA operational base there and thus the practicality for day-to-day demining operations.

DRC-DDG then analyzed the intersectionality of both conflict- and poverty-affectedness, and identified six target areas: Hirske, Muratove, Novotoshkivske, Triokhizbenka, Troitske, and Komyshuvakha.

The Case of Komyshuvakha. Despite many unique traits, Komyshuvakha is typical for the conflict-affected Popasna district, Luhansk region, and thereby much of Donbas, Ukraine. This urban village is home to a 3,200-strong community of various national, socioeconomic, and age groups.⁷²⁹ Many citizens have lived here all their lives, while others settled upon displacement (two percent). As the administrative center to six dispersed settlements—Druzhba, Nyrkove, Oleksandropillia, Pryvillia, Viktorivka, and Vyskryva—Komyshuvakha serves as a place of congregation for commerce, schooling, celebration, and the like. Seventeen shops, two schools and kindergartens, as well as

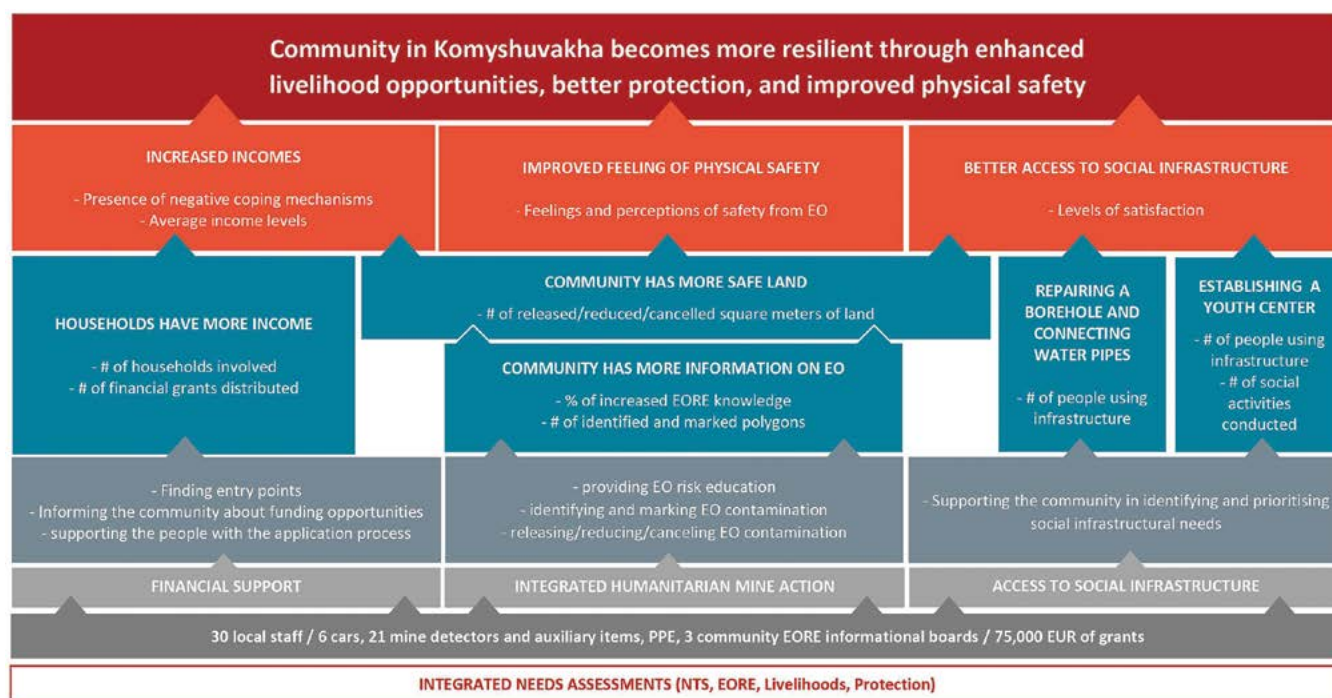


Figure 2. Results chain of DRC-DDG LMAD project in Komyshevukha, Ukraine.

Image courtesy of DRC-DDG / 2020 / Vovk.

post offices, a pharmacy, a clinic, and a cemetery provide some of the essential services to the residents. Agricultural fields are used as the primary source of sustenance, supplemented by foraging in the surrounding forests. The linear pattern of the village follows the railway tracks and central road, connecting Komyshevukha to the city of Popasna and onward to the NGCA.³⁰ However, Komyshevukha faces many challenges, and DRC-DDG employed the first instance of the LMAD to assess these comprehensively.

Integrating needs assessments between (and within) HMA and developmental programs has increased efficiency and inclusivity, and has improved the capacities of staff. Within the scope of this project, DRC-DDG had four specialized fact-finding teams available—NTS, EORE, livelihoods, and protection—whose assessments were correlated. For example, protection and livelihoods asked beneficiaries carefully-selected, HMA-related questions and, upon learning of potential contamination, conveyed information to the NTS team. Similarly, NTS and EORE teams were able to seek and share information on livelihood and protection-related topics. Having four integrated teams on the ground expanded the outreach, especially in terms of accessing a larger pool of people from different socioeconomic statuses. Lastly, given that each team held specialized knowledge, terminology, and methodologies, short trainings and frequent coordination meetings were initiated for cross-training. This reinforced EO awareness among the livelihoods and protection teams and further mainstreamed protection principles among HMA teams. As per the ABD approach, DRC-DDG was able to holistically discern the most pressing needs in Komyshevukha:

- Four confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) of 508,703 sq m of contamination were identified (see Figure 1): two designated as minefields and two as former battle areas. They were all agricultural areas bordering on two entry-exit roads with key

communal and infrastructural objects (borehole, cemetery, railroad tracks, and forest belts).

- Agriculture and animal husbandry were found to be key entry points for economic reinvigoration (with most beneficiaries seeking either micro-business or value-chain livelihood grants for milking or fodder machines, mini-cultivators, barns, hay cutters, seeders, corn grinders, press pickers, harvesters, cattle, poultry, and the like).
- Fourteen renovations of social infrastructure were proposed by active citizen groups around three recurring themes: improving access to water, renovating roads, and equipping spaces for youth.³¹

No matter how comprehensive LMAD projects are, they will inevitably require concessions, compromises, and cooperation. For six priority communities, DRC-DDG had three demining teams (with NTS capacities) as well as EORE, livelihoods, and protection teams at its disposal; discounting middle management and support staff, thirty people were directly engaged. Moreover, it had approximately EUR 260,000 available for its livelihood and community-based initiative (CBI) grants. Aware of its limitations, DRC-DDG reached out to a number of international organizations as well as to local, district, and regional authorities to find external support. For Komyshevukha alone, regional authorities decided to renovate the central road. One of the polygons (SES-MF-0067a) was delegated to the State Emergency Services of Ukraine under a different DRC-DDG project. Then, DRC-DDG designed the results chain (see Figure 2) in line with the available project inputs:

- Three (and later four) demining teams were deployed using a combination of NTS, technical survey, manual mine clearance, and battle area clearance.³²

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DRC-DDG EORE officer inspecting a borehole between hazardous areas in Komyshuvakha, Luhansk region, Ukraine.

Image courtesy of DRC-DDG / 2019 / Velshyna.



- One EORE team conducted a variety of door-to-door and school- and community-based EORE direct sessions (including the distribution of informational leaflets).³³ It also set up three custom-made community EORE informational boards.
- Two CBIs (repairing a borehole and establishing a youth center) were initiated, totaling nearly EUR 35,000. The village council in Komyshuvakha co-invested an additional EUR 2,500.
- Twenty-six micro-business and value-chain grants were also distributed by DRC-DDG.

A results chain also served as the basis for a diversified, contextualized, longitudinal, and summative monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system.³⁴ Measurable links between HMA and development have historically been missing.³⁵ Dr. Lewis Rasmussen calls for new demonstrable impact analytics as to how HMA serves development goals³⁶ (and arguably vice versa), a claim that has gained increasing focus among the international community.³⁷ But to anyone pursuing LMAD projects, this still represents a pioneering exercise. DRC-DDG developed a two-fold M&E system that measures (1) the impacts of individual activities (e.g., EORE continues being measured with pre- and post-tests) and (2) links between HMA and livelihoods and protection (i.e., diversified). The M&E of (1) followed established standard operating procedures but also represented an important fail-safe mechanism for the second, innovative one. Testing new M&E approaches is perilous, as all organizations remain accountable to both donors and beneficiaries, neither of which can afford failure. Alternatively, the M&E of (2) cannot be a one-fit-for-all system, and each community ought to have unique, responsive results chains and corresponding M&E (i.e., contextualized). Moreover, anyone measuring effects on development must appreciate its steady pace. More equipment and access to land

and water might be all an individual needs, but the impact on communal prosperity will take a few harvests to materialize. This means that LMAD projects ought to allow for longitudinal M&E. Finally, a successful LMAD for DRC-DDG will achieve a context-specific developmental goal to which HMA as well as livelihoods and protection activities contribute. In Komyshuvakha, only substantiated beneficial changes to income, access to social infrastructure, and physical safety will achieve an LMAD. Said differently, the whole integration equals the sum of its HMA and development parts (i.e., summative). This brings us to the final ABD step: management and implementation.

LMAD projects will benefit from a centralized management arrangement and flexible implementation. Because LMAD usually contains several specialized programs managed by different people, the tendency to split responsibilities between them rarely fosters the required cooperation and patience for integration. It is not uncommon for different managers to try and assert sometimes contradictory timelines and activities for fear of underachieving their specific program targets. For DRC-DDG, it thus worked better for a coordinator to hold the sole responsibility over the LMAD project while receiving technical guidance from the operations, protection, and livelihoods managers. To further minimize the risks of detrimental clashes, projects should seek the most flexible activities to integrate with HMA. Individual financial grants are one example of flexibility, meeting almost any justifiable livelihood need. CBIs are another instance given that the community can identify and prioritize any and all pressing social necessities. While DRC-DDG worked across Komyshuvakha (and its adjacent settlements), one example stands out.

From Mines to Milk. The intersection of the needs for livelihoods support, access to water, legal assistance, and clearance of EO

contamination exemplifies that multifaceted crises call for multifaceted solutions. As mentioned earlier, the priority entry point for improving the economic wellbeing of the people in Komyshuvakha were agriculture and animal husbandry. Yet, the farmers and other residents faced major issues with access to water: they only had it available for fifteen minutes, four times a day. In such circumstances, financial co-investments alone would not have sufficed for the revitalization of livelihoods, as both animals and field crops require reliable access to water to flourish. The lack of water was a consequence of a key communal borehole (supplying drinking water to some 600 households) being broken, having reduced hydraulic discharge due to silting, and its location situated between two EO-contaminated fields. In fear of the latter, the community was unable to carry out the necessary repairs. To make matters worse, the ownership of the land around the borehole was further complicated by the conflict. The land originally belonged to a private railway company that became separated from the GCA once the contact line with the NGCA was established. For years, this impasse seemed insurmountable. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, DRC-DDG took on the challenge.

LMAD projects do not exclude the concurrent integration of HMA pillars; in fact, they additionally benefit from them. Before any work on the borehole could start, DRC-DDG had to first ensure that the area was safe from EO contamination. NTS was conducted, and markings delineated the safe zone. EORE direct sessions were then provided to the repairmen, increasing their knowledge of safe behavior. Subsequently, DRC-DDG demining teams marked the rest of the polygons with mine signs, followed by door-to-door and community- and school-based EORE direct sessions across Komyshuvakha and

connected settlements. However, DRC-DDG noticed that the mine signs were repeatedly stolen overnight. This is not rare in poverty-stricken communities where mine signs can be sold for scrap metal in exchange for additional income. Daily briefings between HMA teams raised the issue, and the demining and EORE teams decided to complement the mine signs with community EORE informational boards. Several participatory sessions were organized with the residents to stimulate the ownership. The boards were produced from durable plastic to avoid further looting and placed at strategic points across the community (at the polygons, school, and village council).

HMA organizations should not forget that development activities also require special care and expertise. Three (and later four) demining teams continued with clearance on the outside of the safe zone,³⁸ leaving the space for livelihoods, protection, and legal assistance teams³⁹ to proceed. DRC-DDG CBI methodology was uniquely designed to facilitate participatory, inclusive, and integrated developmental processes. It began with joint consultations between the Komyshuvakha village council, local nongovernmental organization (NGO) Komroz, as well as vested farmers and other residents, whom the legal assistance team supported in resolving the housing, land, and property (HLP) rights issue around the borehole. Furthermore, the protection team conducted specialized trainings on budgeting, management, implementation, reporting, monitoring, etc. for the local NGO, which took on the responsibility for the CBI. Ownership of developmental processes often secures their sustainability and builds local capacities. The village council co-invested in the borehole repairs, the residents provided in-kind work contributions, and the NGO utilized DRC-DDG's grant to contract and oversee a specialized company for repairs of the

DRC-DDG EORE officer installing the community EORE informational board in Komyshuvakha, Luhansk region, Ukraine.

Image courtesy of DRC-DDG / 2021 / Ratushniak.






Recipient of a DRC-DDG grant for cattle in Komyshevakh, Luhansk region, Ukraine.

Image courtesy of DRC-DDG / 2021 / Ratushniak.

borehole. Simultaneously, the livelihoods team connected the farmers with this process and its stakeholders, providing grants to those able to capitalize from the improved access to water either by strengthening local value chains, expanding and offering additional employment, or replenishing their diminished livelihood capacities.

Conclusion. The case study of Komyshevakh highlighted a number of lessons learned on implementing projects linking HMA and development. However, a gap in the initial literature/desk reviews prevented further knowledge-creation within the HMA community. A potential classification for LMAD case studies was proposed, encouraging future authors to clarify the dimensions, levels, degrees, types, and timing of their LMAD initiatives. The ABD approach was then introduced as one example of a guiding (theoretical and practical) tool. Through the case study of Komyshevakh, the following LMAD lessons were elaborated:

- Theoretical guidance supports LMAD projects with a tried and tested vision.
- No matter how comprehensive LMAD projects are, they will require external support (either financial or in expertise).
- Integrated needs assessments are more efficient, inclusive, and improve staff capacities.
- LMAD M&E systems should be diversified, contextualized, longitudinal, and summative.
- LMAD benefit from a centralized management arrangement and flexible implementation.
- LMAD stand to gain from concurrent integration of HMA pillars.
- HMA and development activities require special care and expertise. 

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BIOGRAPHY

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ENDNOTES

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30. These include Ukrainians (52%), Russians (40%), Belarusians (5%), and Moldovans (3%). Many are pensioners (40%) with some children (10%). Employed represent 30% of the settlement, mostly as farmers as well as miners, pharmacists, teachers, etc.
31. Data collected through DRC-DDG needs assessments between 2018 and 2021 through (phone and in-person) key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations.
32. By June 2021, DRC-DDG demining teams released 66,417 sq m of land and permanently marked 23,119 sq m of contamination in Komyshevakhka; their work will continue until autumn 2021.
33. In doing so, DRC-DDG EORE team reached 619 residents of Komyshevakhka by June 2021 (or 20% of the entire population): 42.3% male,

57.7% female; 14.7% children (between six and 11 years old), 14.2% adolescent (12 to 17 years old), 38.5% adults (18 to 59 years of age), and 32.6% elderly (60 years old and above).

34. The M&E system was designed to be both formative (field monitoring visits, programme quality checks, quality assurance and quality control, etc.) and summative (focusing on outcomes and capturing lessons learned). Moreover, participatory methodologies are being used, inclusive of needs assessments, community meetings, collection and analyzes of feedback and concerns shared by beneficiaries via complains and reporting mechanism as well as through focus group discussions and key informant interviews.
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38. Due to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent quarantines as well as the winter stand-down period (with cold and snowy weather conditions preventing demining in eastern Ukraine) clearance continues until present day.
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